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Creating a Native American Studies Major at UNL

Frances W. Kaye

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

“...We believe that the description of the development of a major has significant implications for understanding how one group of persons of color functions in White institutions.”

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is a large state university in a state that is approximately 93 percent White. Nebraska has four Indian reservations within its borders and two large reservations immediately to its north. The university enrolls a small number of Native American students, recently averaging about 40 per semester.

The university has offered a Native American studies minor under the auspices of the Institute of Ethnic Studies for approximately 20 years. It now engages in developing a formal major in Native American studies. This paper will detail the survey of current classes and other Native American-related university activities, such as AIROS and the Native American Public Broadcasting Consortium, to determine what can be offered in the major. It will then look at the response from Nebraska tribes and Nebraska and contiguous Indian community colleges to the question of what they would like to see the university provide in a Native American studies major. Third, it will survey the offerings of all Native American studies programs in the United States and Canada that responded to the students, focusing on what the university sees as the niche that makes it distinctive, draws on its strengths, and provides what the Indian communities feel they want from the university.

Since Native Americans, unlike other entire groups in academic "studies" programs, have usually provided a minority of students in Native American studies classes, we believe that the description of the development of a major has significant implications for understanding how one group of persons of color functions in White institutions.

PRESENTER

Frances W. Kaye is Director of Native American Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.